

Fifth Sunday of Lent - John 12:20-33

“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). Again, Jesus?

Or, perhaps more appropriately, *again lectionary*? We just did this in Mark a few weeks ago!

The teaching value of repetition aside, how do we enliven this text, this saying, this lesson in worship again with Holy Week just one week away?

The story in the gospel of Mark is different than in John. The scope of the audience is different in John than in Mark. Whereas the audience for this teaching in Mark is the disciples; in John, the audience is not just the disciples but a crowd of people. Even more curious is that these words serve as an answer, of sorts, to the news Jesus receives that two Greeks want to see him. Suddenly, the teaching about surrendering our lives to God in Mark gains an even greater outward focus in John.

At this stage of our Lenten journey, we encounter the fruit and the charge that comes with losing our life to find it in God—service. We cannot follow Jesus without listening to his instructions and serving our neighbors.

There once was a rice farmer who was going on a long journey but before he left he gave each of his three prodigies a piece of rice to do what they wish. Time passed and eventually, the rice farmer came back. When he asked, the farmer found out that the first person took his piece of rice and did nothing with it. When the farmer took it in his hands, it broke apart. The second individual took the piece of rice and planted it. The rice grew but the person did not take care of the plant and the seeds fell off and

died. When the farmer asked the third person what he did with his seed he said, "Come here." He walked him over to a field and to the farmer's surprise rice plants could be seen as far as the eyes could see. The third man planted the seed, then replanted the seeds that grew from the original seed, and so on and so forth.

The third person was not afraid to give his own energy to expand the fields and provide a rice field for many people.

Jesus today is asking us to do the same. We are to glorify the Lord, by losing our lives to the service of God and to follow Jesus.

Now it would be wrong of me to stand up here and suggest that we all need to smarten up and start to serve the Lord. The congregation of Zion is very committed to serving God and serving the community of Pembroke. Take for example some outside groups: the Foodbank, the Grind, Coldest Night of the Year, First Step options, Robbie Dean Counselling, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Camp Lutherlyn. There are so many organizations that Zion gives to. All for the sake of the gospel and the good news of God's love for them we give both financially and physically. In-house the congregation offers so many programs for both the community and for the membership. The Social Ministry Committee does its best to offer meals to seniors and plan other events. Pastoral Care keeps in touch with our shut-ins. Messy Church touches many generations. Our people who have served for many years and are only able to worship offer service in prayer for their community. All our committees serve to enhance the life of the church. The list is endless.

Losing our lives to God does not mean we burn ourselves out to save the world all on our own. Losing our lives to God also means trusting that God does not need us to do everything—only the things we are called to do.

There is one thing in common with each of these ministries. Not one outreach project or ministry operates individually without the help of a corporate congregational community. As Jesus indicates today, being a follower of Christ requires losing one's life to serve him. We are far greater and more efficient when we work together than if we try to work apart.

Of course, if we're paying attention to the sensory experiences in today's text, we can't miss the booming voice from heaven that some of the crowd mistook for thunder. I can't blame them. Who's expecting the sky to start speaking? But I do wonder who else we're not expecting to speak that we might need to hear from? The children wiggling in the pews next to their parents? A teacher from a nearby school? The local business owner who set up shop downtown? What might these unexpected voices have to tell us about our neighborhood and its needs? And then, how might we, as followers of Jesus, show up where we are needed? Because where there is a need for love and flourishing and community, Jesus is there. And where Jesus is, there we must follow. Amen.